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Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities
Fifth session
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Note verbale dated 1 February 2005 from the Permanent Mission of Burkina Faso to the United Nations addressed to the Secretariat

The Permanent Mission of Burkina Faso presents its compliments to the United Nations Secretariat and has the honour to transmit to it herewith the summary proceedings of the subregional consultation on the draft convention on protection and promotion of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, held at Ouagadougou from 27 to 29 October 2004, and requests that this letter and its annex be circulated as a document of the Ad Hoc Committee (see annex).

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Annex to the letter dated 1 February 2005 from the Permanent Mission of Burkina Faso to the United Nations addressed to the Secretariat

Summary proceedings of the subregional consultation on the draft convention on protection and promotion of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, held at Ouagadougou from 27 to 29 October 2004

The subregional consultation on the draft international convention on protection and promotion of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso from 27 to 29 October 2004, had three major goals: (i) to share information on the ongoing negotiations, and the content, challenges and discussions of the draft convention; (ii) to start a dialogue that should enable the countries of the subregion to update their priorities with respect to the future convention; (iii) to launch the principle of a partnership project with a view to establishing an information centre on disabilities in West Africa for all parties concerned.

The major problems of the subregion involving the situation of persons with disabilities have been identified, as follows: (i) negative prejudices against persons with disabilities; (ii) very high levels of illiteracy stemming from poverty and the shortage of social, education and health services as well as lack of physical access to such services and to information in general; (iii) a strong mentality of dependency and passivity among persons with disabilities resulting not only from past policies but also from social and cultural prejudices and psychological blocks.

All the participants expressed satisfaction that the convention would clearly recognize the legal personality of persons with disabilities. It was commonly held that ratification of the convention by countries of the subregion should not pose any problem. However, implementation of the convention was likely to encounter a number of difficulties in the light of the level of political and economic development of West African countries and their lack of resources. The need to strengthen the capacities of organizations of and for persons with disabilities — particularly organizations of women with disabilities — and their role in the implementation of the convention should be affirmed clearly. Priority should be given to the establishment of monitoring mechanisms and the systematic approval of the convention by all the agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system. Working groups were set up and drafted specific recommendations on the following articles: article 7 (equality and non-discrimination), article 15 (living independently and being included in the community), article 17 (education), article 19 (accessibility) and article 21 (right to health and rehabilitation).

The question of the establishment of a subregional information network for partners with disabilities was extensively debated. The network will have the following goals: (i) to exchange, share, disseminate and coordinate information within the framework of negotiation on and implementation of the future convention; (ii) to build and strengthen the capacity of actors; (iii) to enhance awareness of organizations of and for persons with disabilities and to foster and strengthen their capacities; and (iv) to create and enhance synergies. With respect to the creation of a network, five priorities were identified: (i) establishment of

national networks and drafting of a document relating thereto; (ii) creation of a focal point (outreach centre) in each country; (iii) provision of the necessary resources to all actors concerned; (iv) establishment of a management structure for the independent network of existing organizations and institutions; (v) commitment of the actors to create the network; and (vi) strengthening of the operation of the West African Federation of Disabled Persons — no consensus was reached on this final goal.

At the close of the meeting the participants identified five priorities:

1. Conduct a multisectoral study on the characteristics, social and economic situation and living conditions of persons with disabilities;

2. Strengthening of capacities for intervention and partnerships among the actors dealing with disabilities (Governments, organizations of and for persons with disabilities and professionals);

3. Promotion of integrated education and literacy training so as to foster equal opportunities and combat discrimination;

4. Inclusion in all curricula of the need to raise awareness and provide information on disability issues;

5. Development of social and economic integration programmes for persons with disabilities within the framework of promotion of income-generating activities.

The participants called on the United Nations to:

1. Assist countries in implementing the future convention by providing material, technical and financial support;

2. Establish an information, education and communication network starting at the local level and going onto the national, subregional and international levels, taking advantage of modern technologies and also traditional methods;

3. Help countries that integrate disability issues into their development programmes and poverty-reduction strategies to make their case to donors.